

*Virtues of the Delinquent*

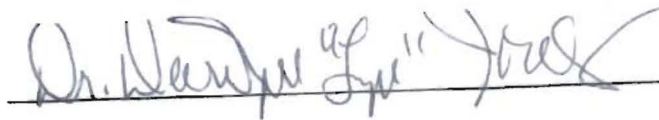
An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

by

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Abstract

Inside every sentient heart drums the heroic beat of a renegade. Educational communities offer guidance and protection to African American inner-city youth but often institutional aims are at odds with inner pulls towards conquering the shadowlands. The outer demands of knowledge and the inner demands of faith have left many students unable to mend the divide between heart and mind. What follows is an exploration into how English Language Arts educators can utilize the written word to effectively guide their students towards achieving an authentic self-literacy.

## Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the insights, guidance, and patience of Dr. Darolyn Jones. Conversations, exchanged ideas, and resources stretching back to my first methods class as an undergraduate have pushed the content presented in this paper as well as my own notions towards life's greater questions of being and purpose. Before her class I was unsure of what it meant to be an educator. Because of her I know that a true educator fights for her students' rights to be self-directed, honest, and accountable. A strong self and social literacy are the keys to personal freedom and a writer who shares his story will always possess those keys.

The Ball State Honors College afforded me one of the most rewarding experiences of my college career and young adult life. Classes, materials, and professors that continually challenged me to question everything with an open heart and mind have transformed education into a continual process of awakening. The first string of safely written papers returned by Dr. Tim Berg with the comment, "think deeper" written over and over again until I finally allowed myself to be okay with being uncomfortable was a regenerating experience. His classes woke me up and that is a debt I can only hope to repay by trying to stir the minds and hearts of my future students.

My fascination with street culture began when a goofy-grinned kid, who had as much of a tendency to skank in the middle of church services as he did to fight against injustices by lifting up others through the NWI music scene, invited me to my first punk show. He

lived without fear of consequence and due to his infectious energy and massive heart he taught us, region rats, how to be free. Levi Thomas, the region's little brother, this paper is for you.



## Virtues of the Delinquent

*In art and dream may you proceed with abandon. In life may you proceed with balance  
and stealth- Patti Smith*

## Surviving in Violent Communities

For generations African American inner-city adolescents have been faced with the challenge of finding secure ground in their ever-shifting neighborhoods. A history of violence, discrimination, and underdeveloped communities haunt the inner life of its occupants. A macabre of masks spelling out stories that stretch from fierce to jaundiced act as shields protecting their inner life and swords defending their outer eminence.

Inner city communities are built upon a number of unstable structural factors.

Deficiencies in basic resources, high levels of violence, and a poverty that permeates the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs of its residents create the backdrop of many African American adolescents' homes and neighborhoods. Communal anxieties such as racial segregation, black male joblessness, housing discrimination, and fluctuating economic opportunities have mired African American neighborhoods and society "to establish basic structural communities and maintain structural control" (Martin, 2005). The long history of unsettlement and concentrated African American poverty in urban environments has taken the time and resources away from this cultural group that are necessary to establish effective social institutions (Martin, 2005). With the deficit of an

outer communal stability these adolescents must learn how to ensure their own safety and survival.

In order for an adolescent to establish his identity in a violent neighborhood he must adhere to the “code of the street.” Members of violent communities establish where they fall in their social hierarchies through force and intimidation. These teens have countless opportunities to learn how to be tough from veteran violent offenders. By learning dangerous street-survival strategies and being pressured to find one’s place in a system of violence and social order, handling daily challenges through aggression becomes the second natured response for many of these kids (Reed et al., 2010).

Coping through violence is an easily understandable reaction for those who live with the daily chronic stresses that pervade inner-city backdrops. Victims of abuse are often part of a vicious cycle that turns the abused into the abuser as a result of early life traumas that rewire the brain. Hypothesized by criminologist Lonnie Athens, violentization is thought to be the four-stage process that victims of abuse undergo. The first stage, brutalization, is when one experiences cruel treatment that leaves a dramatic, lasting effect on the individual. The physical and emotional damage left from the brutalization causes the victim to have vengeful thoughts about his victimizer. Desiring revenge and determining to one-day turn those thoughts into reality is the belligerency stage. Making the crossover from thoughts and feelings into violent action is a major step in this process known as violent performances. “Athens points out that it takes considerable courage because one is sure to put physical as well as psychological safety on the line” (Nichols, 2004). If the

attacker is defeated often, he may accept the role of a subordinate and no longer use violence to handle his problems. If his attacks are successful and bring praise and attention from his community and those close to him, he will likely adapt violent behavior as a way to soothe former physical and emotional wounds and establish a new and powerful identity. If this occurs, violent behavior quickly moves into the virulency stage. “He now firmly resolves to attack people physically with the serious intention of gravely harming or even killing them for the slightest or no provocation whatsoever.” This process often begins during childhood and reaches its final stage during beginning to late adolescence, though this stage can begin and complete itself much earlier if the child was raised in a gang or exposed to violent conflicts (Nichols, 2004).

Trauma induced from experiencing continual acts of aggression in the virulency stage reprioritizes brain processes to only focus on immediate survival and safety needs. Higher order thinking becomes not only seemingly unnecessary but also extremely difficult to access and develop due to the brain’s focus on moment-to-moment survival alone. Learning turns into “memorization of isolated facts.” The chronic stress placed on African American inner-city adolescents puts them in a vulnerable position due to the cognitive changes that take place when exposed to traumatic events. Many of these teens are raised in the most dangerous parts of the country. The distress experienced from these communities present complex challenges to overcoming past pain and navigating toward a healthier future. A solitary focus on survival in a dangerous environment secures these individuals in a violent cycle of abuser and abused. Access to a deeper self-literacy that allows individuals to holistically view life patterns could break this cycle (Nichols, 2004).

Understanding the self has been the endeavor of analytical psychology for the past one hundred years. To find solutions to this challenge we must search the mind of its greatest specialist.

### Uncovering the Three Selves

A question that has pulsed through every human mind throughout civilization: What is it that separates me from the animal kingdom? To know what it means to be human is a psychological endeavor, an ambitious enterprise that one great mind did not shy away from. This field of study and modern mankind owe a debt of gratitude to the founder of analytical psychology, Carl Jung. A therapist, philosopher, and mythologist, Jung searched for an answer to this great question by observing his patients and their dreams. He looked for common themes that connected his patients and, truly, all men in society. What he was looking for was a distinct human nature that could be observed, defined, and understood. What he found were three layers of human consciousness.

Carl Jung posited that human beings contain three distinct selves that are each taxed with the burden of remaining true to their own individual nature as well as finding balance with the other selves. Much like the symbol of the Trinity, the selves are both individually distinct and cohesively one. The self that most closely represents our instinctual side is known as the collective unconscious. This is an inherited nature that all men and women share and have shared since the first fully formed man walked the earth. The human instincts found in the collective unconscious are represented by symbols, or

archetypes. Each archetype can be considered to have a life of its own whose nature must be expressed. These archetypes guide human behavior towards decisions that satisfy their inner needs. An important archetype to innate human resiliencethat Jung believed existed in all men and women is the “hero”. The hero archetype is our courage and will to conquer dark shadows under any circumstance. Our inner hero will press upon us a desire to embrace our inner courage and valor. For the collective unconscious to remain balanced all of the archetypes’ needs must be met. The importance of this self is that this layer is essentially what gives men a common and observable nature. The collective unconscious unites us in shared inner experience(Jung, 1969).

The next layer of consciousness is the personal unconscious. A helpful symbol to represent this self is an afterthought. Every experience we have will have an afterthought that cannot be expressed with words or logic but will leave an emotional and sensorial impression. These impressions are what compose the personal unconscious. To give an example, many children in the United States have experienced falling off a bike for the first time. The child will likely understand he has fallen but other feelings and emotions will also accompany this experience. There may be an afterthought of fear or distrust. The physical memory of an accelerated heartbeat may encode itself into the child’s memory. These afterthoughts are a compendium of personal experience that must be integrated with the archetypes that contain our human nature. Every experience must find peace with our given nature for humankind to truly achieve an inner rest. This process is not easy and it is always in flux for with each experience our nature is challenged. Man

must grow in his own understanding of self to learn how to find peace inside the world and inside his consciousness (Jung, 1990).

The third and most artificial layer of the self is the ego. The ego is commonly used to represent an inflated view of oneself or as a synonym for conceitedness. The origin of this phenomenon is not far from the everyday vernacular. The ego is essentially one's conscious mind. It is a clear space that is free from unconscious demands. The ego commonly expresses itself through logic, order, and other systems that accommodate to the practical demands of everyday moments. When one acts in a present state he is exercising his ego (Jung, 1990). Through in-the-moment experiences he develops the masks he will wear for the world. These personas are performances that allow him to fit into societies large and small. From a father persona to a professional persona the masks help him to navigate between conscious and unconscious reality. The world will make demands on one's performance and the unconscious will make demands as well. The compromises that result are the personas one creates (Jung, 1969).

What has been said about our conscious and unconscious selves is hardly shocking. Most have experienced being both logical and emotional, both in the moment and reflective. What troubled Jung and shined a light on the postmodern age is the sharp *divide* between conscious and unconscious experience. This divide is represented in society as a split between knowledge and faith (Jung, 1990). The battle between heart and mind is age old and reflected in many stereotypes: The science vs. the artist, the poet vs. the mathematician, and the feeling mother vs. the logical father. Society's helpers often rally

for protecting and uplifting human nature. Scientists and academics fight for upward mobility and conquering the moment. The problem at hand does not lie in either logical or emotional thinking. The problem lies in the fact that there is a battle at all. What occurs during the split between knowledge and faith is not hard to imagine. Those who favor knowledge lose sight of their inner humanity and those whose thoughts only dwell inside lose sight of the world's immediate demands.

Our society split between two modes of thinking is only representative of what has been occurring in humankind for thousands of years. Before there was a fast-paced world that continually challenged our nature, there was just our nature. In the beginning it can be assumed that the unconscious was the dominating force of human existence. The ego needed new experiences to develop and become more complex. For millennia the ego has become more and more complex, adapting to the survival needs presented in an infinite number of moments. The more intricate the ego has become the more it has come alive, wanting and demanding more experiences to conquer. Today, western society is ego-driven. The more humankind becomes wrapped up in the moment and the future without reflection on the afterthoughts looming around its inner life, the more disconnected we become from who we really are. Without practicing constant integration of knowledge and faith, mankind may lose recognition of his inner life all together (Jung, 1990).

Jung found that many of his patients had lost touch with their unconscious selves. The archetypes' demands did not disappear from being ignored, however. Rather, they became repressed and subsequently manifested in ugly ways in order to get their

occupant's attention (Jones, Clarkson, Kongram, & Stratton, 2008). This observation has become cornerstone to the current definition of mental instability: when one's inner demands and outer expectations of life are not reconciled, a breakdown occurs (NAMI). The solution to this phenomenon, and one could say also the beginning of art therapy, was to have patients draw their inner worlds, reflected in dreams, on paper. The benefits of this practice were immense. What art was able to do was access the afterthoughts hidden in the senses and emotions inside and bring them to consciousness by having the patient place that hidden world on paper where it could be seen and interpreted. Jung was uniting conscious and unconscious experience. He found that art was a tool that could mend the divide between knowledge and faith. This process of uniting ego and unconscious life was termed by Jung as individuation: the process of becoming whole (Jung, 1969).

The unconscious, as previously mentioned, does not disappear no matter how long it is ignored because it is, at our very core, who we are. Feelings and sensations that make us uncomfortable and we would rather not exist are represented by Jung's archetype, the shadow. There are individual shadows. For example, having an arrogant nature may be a reality for someone but is something that person does not want to accept. There are also societal shadows. These are values and ideas that a society rejects or considers shameful, such as stealing or murder. Inner-city life is an American societal shadow. Racism, violence, and broken communities are not featured highlights on our tourist pamphlets and are realities ignored by residents living just a few miles outside of its wake. Every person and society has a shadow that haunts his conscious life. Though dark, it is not evil.



Rather, it is a reality that is wailing to be heard. Though repressed and hidden, the shadow will not be shut up because its nature is eternal. Refusing to acknowledge darker parts of one's nature will further the divide between conscious and unconscious experience and may leave man acting in a complete present state in an attempt to avoid his own inner reality (Jung, 1969). As Jung eloquently expressed, "As his consciousness has broadened and differentiated so his moral nature has lagged behind. That is the great problem today. Reason no longer suffices" (Jung, 1990, sec.574).

Jung believed that when the shadow is ignored it will manifest in two ways: projection and possession. The dark secret may be projected onto others so its owner may see it come to life in conscious reality. For instance, an inner-city adolescent who wants to believe he holds no responsibility towards his community's violent crimes and is merely a victim of his own circumstance will project the faults onto his peers and become resentful of his friends and neighbors. This projection is really a manifestation of his insecurities towards his own imperfect nature. If he realizes this, the experience has begun to become integrated into consciousness. If he does not, the projections may continue until he makes the connection (Jones, et al., 2008).

The second manifestation, possession, occurs when our unconscious nature overwhelms our conscious life and we become overcome by our shadows. When possessed, a person may act in ways that are out of line with the daily masks he wears. The person will seem completely unlike himself (Jones et al., 2008). An example of this would be an adolescent who wears a God persona and pushes others away to keep himself feeling

*holier than thou* in his community and separate from its shadows. When he is confronted with a personal flaw that threatens the safety found in his God-complex he lashes out in an unexpected rage. His shadow has possessed him in an attempt to wake him up. Projection and possession will appear time and again until they are heard, accepted, and integrated (Jung, 1990).

Denying one's shadow is attempting to be "perfect." Perfect is of course contingent on a societal definition and expectation. The problem with perfection is that perfect people do not need others. They also do not exist. Part of being human is having a shadow archetype that lives inside of you and challenges you to find a balance between societal expectations and inner demands. Humans bond over this shared nature and, in turn, bond over their weakness. The great danger in denying the shadow is allowing projection and possession to divide fellow men. If one fails to recognize these manifestations as part of himself and instead believes that all other men are the source of evil, he will *other* his fellow brothers and sisters and create a divide built on contempt and thirst for power found in perfection in an ego-driven world (Jung, 1969). "Where love stops, power begins, and violence, and terror" (Jung, 1990, sec. 580). This ugly cycle begins when one refuses to see his true nature.

How does one go about conquering his shadow nature? Jung would argue that conquering evil is futile. What is needed is a change in perspective. Acknowledging both good and evil in our nature is the first step to understanding, managing, and finally integrating our shadows into conscious reality. Still, this can be carried further. What is good and evil is

subjective which is why these terms only emerge in the subjective reality of consciousness. Unconsciousness does not care for value judgments, only that its needs are met. Ironically, a nature characterized by emotions and sensations is the more objective reality a human can attain. If terms like good and evil are irrelevant to our nature then what our shadow is really highlighting is that there is no evil nature, just balance and imbalance. There must be a balance between unconscious and conscious life for the former is our source of inspiration and the latter is able to bring those inspirations to life (Jung, 1969).

Embracing shadows requires embracing others for everything they are. An essential component to being human is having a capacity and desire to understand another's experience. This desire is rooted in the visual and motoric components of the brain through what are commonly known as mirror neurons. Mirror Neurons permit one to acquire a visual and motoric conception of another's experience allowing the viewer to gain a rudimentary understanding of what he sees. When one observes another, mirror neurons attempt to recreate the experience in his head both visually and somatically. This allows him to experience what another is experiencing even though the involvement is limited to inside his mind. Cognitively, the beginning of understanding is both visual and experiential (Winerman, 2005). If Jung were aware of mirror neurons he might suggest that visual and experiential beginnings of understanding are the afterthoughts of our personal unconscious attempting to integrate into our waking life.

This issue of repression surrounding the shadow becomes relevant in the way schools view their African American inner-city students. The educational field, like any profession, carries a set of values that permeate its institution. One could say the culmination of those values could be considered an archetype. The educational archetype notoriously views students through the “innocent-child” lens. The innocent-child theory posits that all children are born innocent and if the school protects them from unwanted influences and encourages them to follow a path they deem moral and admirable then the child will grow up uncorrupted and become a positive member of society (Jones et al., 2008). This is a very idealistic and noble institutional value. Wanting to protect children from danger and encourage their success is something expected from our schools, but is pretending these students are unaware of corruption and questionable intents truly helpful? Jung might argue that this is a societal attempt at repressing shadows. Children share the same human nature as fully developed adults and therefore are innately capable of all good and bad that have been committed in human history. The collective urges that shape our values and subsequent actions live inside all children so they would therefore be able to recognize ill-balanced motives in others and themselves. Censoring the classroom from inappropriate behavior could likely teach students to suppress their own human nature. As previously discussed, repression will only cause shadows to emerge in other more violent forms until they are integrated into consciousness. Students will act out their shadows or repress them so deeply that the divide between knowledge and faith will become their reality, pulling them away from gaining access to true self-literacy.

## Trauma-Informed Practices

Violent communities are a chronic source of stress for their adolescent residents. The continual concern for both physical and emotional survival is a yoke that cannot be completely removed from their shoulders and is so heavy that many will feel completely crushed and helpless under its weight. One who lives in a constant state of fear and feels helpless to overcome that fear is considered to be living with trauma. The definition of individual trauma agreed upon by those in the fields of social work, medical, and research communities is as follows:

“Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (SAMHSA, 2012).

A traumatic event threatens one's safety and puts that person in survival mode. When in survival mode a person's mind and body's first priority is to escape the stressful event and retreat to a safe place. The three ways one can respond to a threatening life event are known as flight, fight, and freeze responses. A flight response is when one runs away from the danger. A person would choose to flee if he felt he was unable to conquer the danger but still had a chance at escape. If one felt he could physically defeat his trauma he would choose the fight response. This is literally when one chooses to fight in response to danger. The freeze response is a response where one mentally and

emotionally dissociates from the situation and shuts down from fear. He does not fight or run away. This person becomes immobile. A traumatized individual can respond to stressful situations in any of these three ways and often will when there is no obvious danger visible. Living with trauma means constantly living with a crippling fear that can overcome you with or without apparent reason (Steele & Machiodi, 2012).

The trauma type that will be the focus of this paper is chronic trauma, or trauma that occurs because of a series of events that cause undue stress as well as fear and a sense of helplessness (Steele & Malchiodi, 2012). Residents who live in violent communities that do not provide for their safety needs will be vulnerable to chronic trauma and a thorough understanding of its effects will enable inner-city educators to better understand the literacy proficiencies and needs of their students.

If one desires to understand the effects of individual trauma it is important to first understand how traumatic memories are physically and neurologically stored. When a distressing event occurs, such as witnessing a shooting or being hurt in a fight, the event does not immediately fit into a “contextual memory” because of its shocking contrast to one’s daily experiences and ideal worldview. Rather, the memory becomes temporarily dissociated from consciousness. The afterthoughts of the traumatic event are stored as “sensory fragments that have no linguistic components” (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 1996). What are being stored are the impressions of the experience, in their sensorial and iconic form, waiting patiently to be noticed and integrated into consciousness.

Neurobiologists, trauma researchers, and art therapists are in agreement: trauma is stored on the right side and mid-region of the brain that processes images and sensations. This finding is significant because traditional cognitive-behavioral and talk therapy may not be an effective means of gaining access to traumatic memories because these memories do not have a linguistic component: they are visual and sensorial (Steele & Machiodi, 2012). Reflecting on Carl Jung's position regarding the personal unconscious, the traumatic memories are visual because they are part of our unconscious selves that need to find peace with our broader human nature, or collective unconscious. If significant life experiences were stored linguistically it would suggest that important moments need to be integrated with the superficial ego. If this were the case one would never grow from personal experiences as well as better understand his true nature that occurs through careful reflection and integration of conscious and unconscious life. All experiences would remain on a superficial level. Rather, traumatic memories pull us back to our real self, a self that is deep in symbolism and personal meaning. It is in the unconscious that life events find potential for personal growth (Jung, 1990).

Chronically traumatized individuals who have lived through multiple stressful events can lose the sense of who they are and feel helpless to experiencing positive change. Living in continual trauma, survivors will learn to process most daily events through the mid-brain region. With an emphasis on sensorial performance an imbalance between right and left-brain functioning will be the outcome. In other words a split between logical and emotional thinking will occur, and to reiterate, a divide between knowledge and faith will

result. Trauma victims will live in an emotional state of fear, unable to logically interpret daily experiences because the survivor will have become accustomed to processing events from an internal, sensory perspective. In turn, cognitive development can become delayed from lack of use and higher levels of thinking will not be reached. When one can no longer access his cognitive functioning to work through problems one will understandably become a helpless victim to daily challenges. In a sense, emotional shock becomes the dominating influence in a traumatized individual's life and he becomes trapped in a cycle of dissociated shadows and accompanying despair (Gil, 2006).

The ego's needs, however, do not disappear. Those who live in violent communities will still be expected to act out their personas created by violentization in order to survive and establish an identity among their peers. With a violent mask, these community members will satisfy their immediate survival needs through violence and posturing alone with little cognitive reflection on the effectiveness of this approach. These adolescents are helping continue the cycle of violence by reacting with an underdeveloped ego. They are also being possessed by a dissociated personal unconscious. The ego and unconscious are reacting to the trauma from opposite ends. If the individual is to ever find balance, knowledge and faith will need to work together.

Understanding the cognitive effects trauma has on inner-city adolescents is incredibly valuable if educators are going to create effective literacy instruction for these students. It has been mentioned that the left hemisphere of the brain becomes neglected in chronically traumatized individuals. More specifically, language development becomes



considerably affected. At extreme moments of terror the left side of the brain can actually shut down and leave the individual cognitively unable to process his surroundings.

Furthermore, the Broca's area of the brain that is linked to speech production is so severely affected that students will be left with a "speechless terror." They will be unable to communicate their trauma through words (Steele & Machiodi, 2012).

The majority of African American inner-city adolescents read at a second-grade level. Some researchers suggest the reading level could be marked at preliterate because of the way certain tests are structured (Guerra, 2012). It was previously mentioned that higher order thinking skills are not reached by many in this demographic because of the cognitive focus on survival. This is because many of these adolescents exist in a sensorial reality and the left side of the brain becomes underused and, in effect, higher-order thinking remains underdeveloped. With a limited ability to cognitively construct and re-order information in a meaningful way, many at-risk youths become stuck in negative life circumstances and suffer from the extreme negative emotions that accompany these events (Nichols, 2004.)

When trauma cannot be verbally expressed it becomes trapped in the visual and sensorial unconscious. The traumatized individual, through possession, can then "re-live" his traumatic experiences numerous times and be left unaware of what triggers these terrifying episodes. If the cognitive area of our brain cannot be easily accessed to bring these traumas to consciousness, the question remains, what is an effective means to

accessing and working through traumatic memories and improving the self-literacy of inner-city adolescents?

The effects of an underdeveloped literacy and continual interaction with violence become grave when the high number of violent crimes and crime-related deaths are exposed.

Although comprising a small percentage of the general population, African American adolescents are responsible for nearly 45% of violent crime index arrests. Navigating through social communities by intimidation is the norm and the consequences go much further than time in jail. African American males are three times more likely to die by a handgun than their white male counterparts. They are also more likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance than by any other means (Martin, 2005).

Discrimination has left many hostile effects on African American inner-city life. The previously mentioned unstable structural factors such as racial segregation, black, male unemployment, and housing discrimination often lead to anger, depression, and acts of aggression in these adolescents. The emotional wars living inside these students have had profound influence on their academic careers. Outcomes of this turmoil include low grades, academic ability, self-concept and self-esteem, and psychological resiliency (Martin, 2005). Innocent-child theory attempts to ignore the outside pressures and influences that students are confronted with daily. Educational systems are expected to prevent their students from acting on deviant impulses by sheltering them from the metaphorical and literal outside world but when one is treated cruelly, and discrimination is an example of maltreatment, the victim will break away from these social structures

and become delinquent. Acting out in an established institution such as a school and performing poorly in academics are natural outcomes of trauma-induced discrimination (Reed et al., 2010).

The unwelcoming persona of an institution given off by schools to African American inner-city youth is only part of the problem in regards to reaching these students through learning communities. Often schools breed a different community. “It seems that youth on the path to gang involvement are respected, liked, and disliked by many of their peers in school” (Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2005). As previously mentioned, adolescents who receive praise or attention for violent acts will learn to handle most life situations by physically proving their dominance over others. Schools offer the attention that many of these youths crave to feel important. Further, they provide social opportunities for these adolescents to meet other troubled youth. “School environments with high rates of failure and peer acrimony will serve as breeding grounds for deviant peer groups, gang involvement, and consequently, high rates of serious problem behavior” (Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2005). This phenomenon is often explained by the social code theory that hypothesizes that individuals form groups based on interests. For students who are failing academically and struggling to process their experiences due to their constant focus on survival, finding support and acceptance among those with shared experiences is vital (Lahey et al, 1999). The danger in this is that peers reinforce violent behaviors and now a violent individual has access to collective power. Unsurprisingly, schools are often the breeding grounds of gang formation and recruitment (Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2005).

With a failing literacy rate and apprehension towards educational institutions, the question regarding how to reach at-risk inner-city African American adolescents becomes imperative. A few factors crucial to academic success are missing from this demographics' school experience. First, as research has shown, their minds need to feel safe if they are ever to reach higher order thinking skills and become literate in written text and in their communities (Nichols, 2004). Further, these adolescents need to be able to do an authorial reading of their own lives by learning why the rules and social structures in their learning community exist and how to positively navigate their way through their school environment. (MacGillvary, 2007). Essentially, schools need to transform into strong communities that value each individual student and are trauma informed. Trauma-Informed practices are careful and attentive methods to integrative care.

Trauma-Informed practices have been a source of concern for neuropsychologists, art therapists, and biologists for the past century. A rudimentary but solid foundational basis for trauma care has been established and will also be the foundation for the suggested practices recommended in this paper. According to *Trauma Informed Practices for Children and Adolescents* and supported by the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, trauma-informed practices “address individuals’ ‘survival brains’ through sensory and somatic experiences, and enhance self-regulation, trauma integration, and healthy relationships and environments” (Steele & Machiodi, 2012, Ch.1). Understanding how survival brains function is cornerstone to effective literacy instruction and effective

psychological care because both will need to understand the perspectives of these adolescents in order to aid their self-literacy in reaching a higher level. The ultimate goal of this paper is for educators to help inner city adolescents gain a better understanding of their conscious and unconscious selves and move from merely victims of their environments to successful thrivers.

Elaborating further on the needs of a trauma-informed approach, one should understand how both the mind and body react to traumatic events, understand that trauma symptoms are signs of coping and resilience and not pathologies, encourage cultural awareness and respect, and help traumatized individuals move from survivors to thrivers through “skill building, support networks, and resilience enhancement” (Steele & Malchiodi, 2012, Ch.1). All of these elements will be elaborated on but first this paper will address the necessity for understanding both the need for integrating emotional memories as well as the importance of self-regulating body memories.

The mid-section of the brain creates both emotional and sensorial experiences. This means that trauma is also a physiological experience. A racing heartbeat, sweaty palms, and elevated body temperature could all become trauma memories. When an upsetting occurrence transpires the body along with the mind will react to the event. The physical response pulls us back to the flight, fight, or freeze reaction that occurs when one feels in danger. If the energy from that experience is not completely expended, the body will store the energy as a body memory. If one begins to feel similar physical sensations created during a past traumatic event, he will relive that trauma (Steele & Machiodi,

2012). The body memories create the possibility for repeated traumatic symptoms (Levine, 1997). Reliving these episodes without knowing how to integrate and regulate these moments will cause one to feel hopeless to ever overcoming past pain. That, unfortunately, is the essential tragedy of living with trauma: you are constantly afraid.

This paper has extensively addressed the need for integrating traumatic experiences into consciousness and will continue to elaborate on that need but it is just as worthy to note the need of self-regulating bodily afterthoughts. Before one can integrate these memories one must be able to control them so that one does not repeatedly become victim of their possession. Learning how to self-regulate requires first being mindful of physical changes in one's body and learning how the physical experiences can effect one's behavior. After one becomes aware of his own possession he will then need to learn how to breathe through these experiences and bring himself back to a place of calm and safety (Rothschild, 2000).

Gaining control over physiological memories will help traumatized individuals acquire a sense of control in their lives as well as enable them to step back from their unconscious selves and practice self-reflection. A large part of recovery lies in self-regulation. A self-regulated adolescent will be able to create a feeling of safety that is necessary before she can begin to cognitively understand her experience. Self-regulation is a stepping-stone for traumatized individuals in helping them gain access to their ego. When one no longer feels threatened she can logically comprehend her environment, a necessary achievement for conscious integration and post-traumatic growth (Rothschild, 2000).

In addition to self-regulation that encourages a sense of safety, unconscious afterthoughts need to find balance with one's nature and then become integrated into conscious reality. Before these memories can be linguistically expressed and integrated they need to be represented in symbolic sensory forms. This is the essential practice of art therapists and it also is akin to Jung's approach to dream interpretation mentioned earlier. Carl Jung recognized that dissociated memories are afterthoughts that need to be synthesized with their parental archetypes. Neurobiologists are also finding that these sensorial memories are rich sources of symbolism that need to first be understood as visual symbols before they can be linguistically expressed. Understanding trauma memories in their visual form shows respect to the traumatizer's survival brain. It is also the only effective way to understand the nature of the trauma. The memory is encoded in a visual and sensory form so it can challenge us towards personal growth and better self-understanding (Greenwald, 2005).

The most obvious approach to expressing visual memories is through visual art. Drawing, painting, and other expressive arts allow one to communicate their non-linguistic memories accurately through use of shapes, colors, and textures. Communicating through symbols "provides the opportunity to convey confusing, uncomfortable, or unresolved concerns" (Steele & Malchiodi, 2012, Ch. 3). Memories that cannot be expressed with words can be seen through color. Abstract concepts that do not yet have a logical interpretation have a way to escape its owner and find life on the outside. Art is a way for

the unconscious to find the freedom of its expression without resorting to more extreme and paralyzing forms of projection and possession.

Using art as way to access traumatic memories does more than give a mode of expression to the unconscious. When the memory is outside of oneself and one also feels safe with seeing the memory, the adolescent can begin to understand what was inside of him and cognitively reflect on the needs of his own human nature. This is an exercise in self-reflection that will activate the use of his cognitive functions. Art making is an entire brain activity that accesses the symbolic nature of the right hemisphere and the logical and linguistic nature of the left hemisphere through the process of creation, reflection, and application (Steele & Machiodi, 2012). The personal unconscious is the source of the art being made. The art will be reflected upon and integrated into the collective unconscious. Finally, the lessons learned from self-reflection will be applied to the daily functioning carried out by the ego. Uniting these two hemispheres also unites one's inner and outer worlds and successfully helps the adolescent achieve individuation.

One cannot achieve individuation alone. Repeated time and again, with every experience comes an afterthought. Through simple observations our minds are working to recreate others' experiences in ourselves. Hard-wired for empathy, the senses and emotions that we are naturally inclined to feel connect us to others in an attempt to understand. The predisposition to understand life around us may be because one cannot understand herself without understanding others around her. New people and experiences challenge us to



reflect on our nature and where those afterthoughts stolen from observing others fit into our lives. It is through others that we discover who we are (Ramachandran, 2011).

Writing plays an interesting role in stimulating empathy in individuals. A field of study known as literary neuroscience has emerged due to curiosity towards the heightened levels of empathy that have been found in individuals after reading a piece of fiction. Taken from an interesting piece written on the relationship between fiction and empathy, “Phillips and her colleagues found that the whole brain appears to be transformed as people engage in close readings of fiction. Moreover, there appear to be global activations across a number of different regions of the brain, including some unexpected areas such as those that are involved in movement and touch. This research helps to explain how we become immersed in novels, actually feeling as though we are within the story and that the house could burn down and we wouldn't notice. We actually place ourselves in the story (Leavy, 2014).

The brain is acting in ways that are similar to the way mirror neurons react when observing others. When reading fiction, the brain attempts to create new experiences cognitively, emotionally, and somatically so they become as real and “ours” as possible. What this research highlights is the usefulness writing has in helping adolescents find themselves in relation to their communities and integrating successfully into the social world through a developed academic literacy and self-literacy. Many inner-city

adolescent have already discovered this secret and what had spawned from this finding is the only global art and writing movement created and developed entirely by kids: graffiti.

### Virtues of the Delinquent

The origins of the graffiti movement that would become universal in a matter of decades can be explained quite simply in a charming anecdote. James Kilroy, an Irish Bostonian and patriarch of a large family had evaded recruitment from both World Wars solely due to the odd year he was born but had found himself signed on to Fore River Shipyard days before the attack on Pearl Harbor. This shipyard would produce the ships and vessels that would be used by American soldiers and sailors across oceans and continents in the war that brought most of the world in arms. Kilroy's job as a rate-setter was to estimate how much time it would take tradesmen to complete certain tasks and then make sure the tasks were completed before the next tradesmen moved forward with their assignments. When he completed a job he would write, "Kilroy was here" in yellow grease pencil on the vessels. A former sign painter, he had a pleasant signature. Soldiers from all over the country spread out in lands completely foreign to them, arriving nervous and not knowing what to expect, would stumble upon comfort when looking upon their vessel and finding that Kilroy was already here and everything was fine. The "Kilroy" moniker became world-famous and soon everyone wanted to know who Kilroy was. In the height of his fame the rate-setter began adding to his signature a drawing of a sweet-faced man peaking over a fence. This mark had brought comfort and a feeling of safety that can only come from home to so many soldiers, young men tasked with defending the world's

chance at future peace, and many who had only just graduated high school (Gastmon & Neelon, 2010).

Kilroy's simple tag had shown the country that one could become famous if his name was displayed frequently enough. A simple rate-setter from Boston, Massachusetts achieved worldwide status because he decided to write his name on his community. Kilroy started a conversation with the United States and they listened.

James Kilroy innocently spurred the name-based graffiti movement that would be picked up in Philadelphia and New York City in the 1960s but one could trace the use of name monikers in the United States back to the 1850s in the height of immigration, segregation, and some of the earliest American "ghettos". It is true that graffiti emerged with America's earliest gangs. In early Los Angeles when Mexican immigrants could not join unions like their white counterparts and were forced to live in poorer neighborhoods, slighted communities began to group together and support each other and out of this grew fierce protection over their neighborhoods. These community members would write their names on walls that set the boundaries of their turf. This type of communal support began getting picked up by other segregated immigrants and soon gangs could be found wherever there was a project development (Gastman and Neelon, 2010). The original intent of graffiti was to keep people separate. The name-graffiti movement turned this purpose on its head when being famous and heard by as many as possible became the aspirations of the inner-city youth living in these communities.

The start of the graffiti movement reinvented by kids is often attributed to the Philadelphia *legend*, CORNBREAD. Darryl Alexander McGray, or Cornbread as he was known on the streets, was an African American inner-city adolescent and member of the local Youth Development Center. Like many adolescents of the center he wrote his name all over the walls in an attempt to gain attention and recognition from his peers. What made Cornbread different was that he did not limit his writing career to school walls. Darryl put his name on everything from his local church to all of Northern Philadelphia (Gastman & Neelon, 2010).

Tagging is a social literacy practice common among many African American inner-city adolescents. To be able to read and create tags one must understand the literacy rules for the activity, its connection with himself, and its connection with his environment. Essentially, the reader and author of tags must make text-to-text, self, and world connections in order to fully understand the meaning behind the names and personally create meaningful personas of his own. This is an activity that adolescents take part in so they can find themselves in their communities. Often very expressive and full of meaning, taggers are able to speak to their community and explore their own thoughts as they communicate with themselves in a search for identity (MacGillivray & Curwen, 2007).

Tagging is also an iconic and sensory activity. Artists create their identities with color and style that reflect neighborhood allegiance, personal flair, and individual vision. Integrating their inner selves with their outer identities street artists explore who are with

who they could be. The act in itself is a physical experience that allows the artist to transform bodily memories trapped in past lives into something lively, awake, and outside of himself. Like dream interpretation of Jung and visual therapy of art counselors, graffiti offers the inner-city adolescent potential to stir his inner life awake.

To an untrained eye, many tags are unreadable. This is often purposeful because they allow the writers to communicate their messages from a distance. Gradually interacting with an environment that, in general, is commonly reacted to with violence, taggers have found a medium to cautiously communicate thoughts, fears, and desires that quietly scream out their inner humanity. Through spray paint and words, these at-risk youth are learning how to speak to their community, though in disguise (MacGillivray & Curwen, 2007).

To graffiti artists a tag is a hit and a hit is as kill. If one could put his name all over advertisements, government buildings, public transportation, and businesses he had conquered his neighborhood. Many artists set out to put their name in places where they could not be ignored. In western society a few voices are heard the loudest (through advertisements, politics, and business) and nowhere is there a place designated for the inner-city kid to take a stand. So, the kids grabbed their markers and paint and took those places away from others. For some artists like New York legend, Cay161, the bravery of these acts came from an inner faith that the Lord was on the side of the artist. That was the faith of graffiti. Cay161, Cornbread, and others were working for something bigger

than what their world was ready to hand them. Graffiti was an inner calling and artists would soon fight for the right to express their true nature at extreme costs (Mailer, 2009).

In early 1960s Philadelphia teenagers would band together and form social clubs. Many different social clubs would attend events and, a lot like fraternities and sororities, these groups were a way for young adults to network with each other. Cornbread spotted Delta Phi Soul downtown one night and wanted to leave a memorable impression. To get their attention he tagged his name where they were congregated. To both Darryl's and the group's surprise, members of Delta Phi Soul could not believe they were standing in front of the legendary Cornbread and that he was truly from Philadelphia. They invited him to join their group and together these boys started painting their names all over the city. This was the beginning of the first graffiti crew in history (Gaston & Neelon, 2010).

In the beginning of this movement the city was divided into two graffiti camps, one located in the North part of town and the other in the West. Cornbread noticed the leader of the west camp, COOL EARL, because he had "cool" written on the back of his shirt and the two embraced, instantly bonded over their mutual admiration of each other's work. With the two camps connected, the graffiti scene became a citywide movement (Gaston & Neelon, 2010). Graffiti was no longer solely about setting boundaries. Artists were crossing neighborhoods to bond over their writing. Graffiti was breaking down walls founded on racism and segregation and a new camp was forming in the east coast: a kingdom built for rainbow-spouted royalty.

Though the tags did not last long, the stories of late-night runs and new friendships lasted a lifetime. This medium is not permanent and neither are the writers. Through a constant battle between and knowledge and self our messages change, we grow, and this medium allows for our transience. These writers were not just throwing up tags. Through new stories and a new medium they were rewriting their identities (Powers, 1999).

Philadelphia may have had Cornbread but New York City had Taki183. Demetrius, a Greek kid from Brooklyn, had trouble fitting in his neighborhood until he met Julio204. Demetrius would see the tag Julio204 and was so entranced with the moniker that he set out to find its creator and in doing so began his own tagging career. Picking up Julio's style of adding his street number to the end of his name, Demetrius combined his home with his nickname and became Taki183 (Gaston & Neelon, 2010).

Those who knew Taki from school said he became obsessed with tagging. Others would tag buildings in the neighborhood but Taki always took it to the next level. His marks grew larger and more elaborate throughout his career because Demetrius was shooting for fame. One of his claims to fame landed in the New York Subway system. Most street artists were hitting up buses with their tags traveling throughout their borough, but Taki and others realized they could be seen throughout the entire city and started tagging the sides of subway cars. The tags became more extravagant and the name-graffiti movement pushed further into the realm of art when Taki created large two-color bubble letters of his name, known to others taggers as a piece. Resembling the letters found in a comic

book, their likely source of inspiration, Taki183's persona became vibrant, unusual, and larger-than-life (Gaston & Neelon, 2010).

When graffiti hit the subways the movement took off like the Flash. Veteran taggers would notice that a car with only a few tags would make its rounds in the city and return a color explosion. Teens everywhere were finding a way to be somebody and in 1960s New York, a city where heroine addicts and Broadway stars walked the same streets of opportunity, many of them must have felt like the Bronx Daredevil or Captain of Segregated America, street regenerations of the signatures they lifted (Gaston & Neelon, 2010).

Taggers were not just writing names and pieces, they were recreating their egos with color, texture, and a rush of late-night adrenaline. Other teens were reading the stories of kids-turned-superheroes perhaps on the subway trip to and from school, and found themselves in those tales as well. Inner-city adolescents were getting in touch with their hero archetype, a symbol that is not victimized but is capable of conquering evil through will and courage (Gaston & Neelon, 2010). This shared human connection among taggers found a home in the city kids' inner-hero. With a powerful name, captivating medium, and inner guidance these kids were transforming. Graffiti was a path to individuation.

For every band of superheroes there is always a villain. Perhaps the good and evil need each other just as our egos and unconscious need the constant struggle to find balance. In the early 1970s the source of trouble and thrill for New York City taggers was Mayor



John Lindsay. Young, ambitious, and dreaming of the White House, Mayor Lindsay was in the right political office at the wrong time. Civil Rights, Rock and Roll, and the Vietnam War made New York City look and feel dark and unstable. Rebellion in the streets felt more immanent as kids were painting their names and thoughts everywhere and anywhere and no one was trying to stop them. Society's shadows were poisoning the air and the new mayor was choking on fear. Lindsay was powerless to stop the war or Rock and Roll but perhaps he could instill a bit of stability by quieting the city's walls. Unfortunately for Lindsay, they weren't done talking (Mailer, 2009).

The law, once turning a blind eye to street art in favor of focusing on more serious crimes and gang activity, now came down hard on any youth bold enough to hold a spray can in the streets. The police beatings were worse, the jail time was longer, and the artist could be forced to clean off his work and the work of other artists, a punishment Norman Mailer described as emotionally painful as Cezanne being forced to clean off the works of Van Gogh. (2009). At this time if the artist was over 18 he could receive life in jail for a piece, but the law did not destroy the graffiti movement. Rather, it highlighted the inner strength and cleverness of the city's lowest artists (Gastman & Neelon, 2010). These kids did not act as victims to violence and fear. Inside, their collective unconscious pulled them towards a greater well of courage that could not be overcome by violence and trauma.

Graffiti, thanks to the early creativity and perseverance of cities like Philadelphia and New York, continued to spread and evolve throughout the world. From simple tags grew

elaborate pieces, paste-ups, and murals. Each form said something unique for the artist and all took a keen eye and social literacy to understand. Graffiti artists wore society's shadows with pride and succeeded in creating beauty out of others' fears. Segregation, poverty, and delinquency were written into the tags in bright colors for all of the country to see. The graffiti community's real superheroes embraced their true nature and found a way to create something beautiful in a world that wanted nothing to do with them (Powers, 2009). Through self-exploration and courage to face the shadows, African American inner-city taggers are the immune system of the city (Banksy, 2006). They may understand the divide between knowledge and faith well enough to save us all. We should start listening.

Spray paint and a clean surface were and continue to be an inner-city adolescent's pen and paper. Graffiti is not given the same respect in schools as the five-paragraph essay but the pages written on community walls reads much louder. Perhaps the real threat lies in educated people unable to read messages of the delinquents and societal shadows keeping its leaders from becoming bilingual in "street". It is a shame when even casual conversation skills could illuminate the messages written plainly on the walls. The pages go unread but the writers never stop writing. The inner-city kid may not be an advertiser or a rich man who can pay to put his message in everyone's morning coffee but that does not keep him from dreaming out loud the story he wants to see come true. These are the virtues of the delinquent. Summarized by immortal tagger LSD OM,

My first impression of why other people were writing was because I felt people were angry, upset that they didn't have a voice in the world, that the government was telling us how it was and how it was going to be, and I think people were too free to let that happen. Writing was a way of saying, 'Don't make a decision without consulting us. Look at this wall and all these lives here. You may not see these people standing on the platform of the train, but all of these names you see are people with lives and meaning'(Gaston and Neelon, 2010, pg. 23).

The first step educators need to take to protect their students' expressions is to learn how to read their stories. Much has been said about the literacy levels of African American students but the level of higher order thinking that goes into the only art and writing movement created and developed by kids is undeniable. By improving our own social literacy we can better understand the abilities of our students that cannot be measured by standardized assessments alone. Self and social awareness are literacies that these students need to better know themselves and where they fit in their communities. The graffiti movement shows the impressive grasp many adolescents have of these concepts and we can continue to help them strengthen these literacy needs by becoming aware of their stories. In turn we can also take lessons from them on how to strengthen our own self and social literacies.

Welcoming taggers in classrooms that lack community is an opportunity for educators to bring in a part of this demographics' culture and connect their reading and writing instruction to personal meaning making. Learning how to read the complex nature of tags

by shape, size, and color will naturally strengthen literacy abilities because it requires higher-order cognitive skills such as analysis and synthesis. More importantly, this activity will open up a dialogue between students and educators. Only when these formerly discouraged classroom conversations occur and these students take ownership of their thoughts and experiences will the formerly feared institution begin to transform into a supportive community.

Just as important as it is to listen to our students it is also important to advocate for the rights of their self-expression. This paper does not promote encouraging students to participate in illegal activity and jeopardize their futures. It does, however, recognize the fact that many African American inner-city students have already taken their voices to the streets and they are worth listening to. Communities are filled with many different types of characters that are all faced with the challenge of uniting knowledge and faith. One cannot mend this divide without the freedom to express his inner nature and afterthoughts to the world. Many adolescents go to extreme measures to put their name on their communities because the inner pull to do so is strong. Educators should respect their students' journeys towards individuation because it is through these journeys that our kids truly become self-literate.

If you still need convincing, stop to the read the walls...

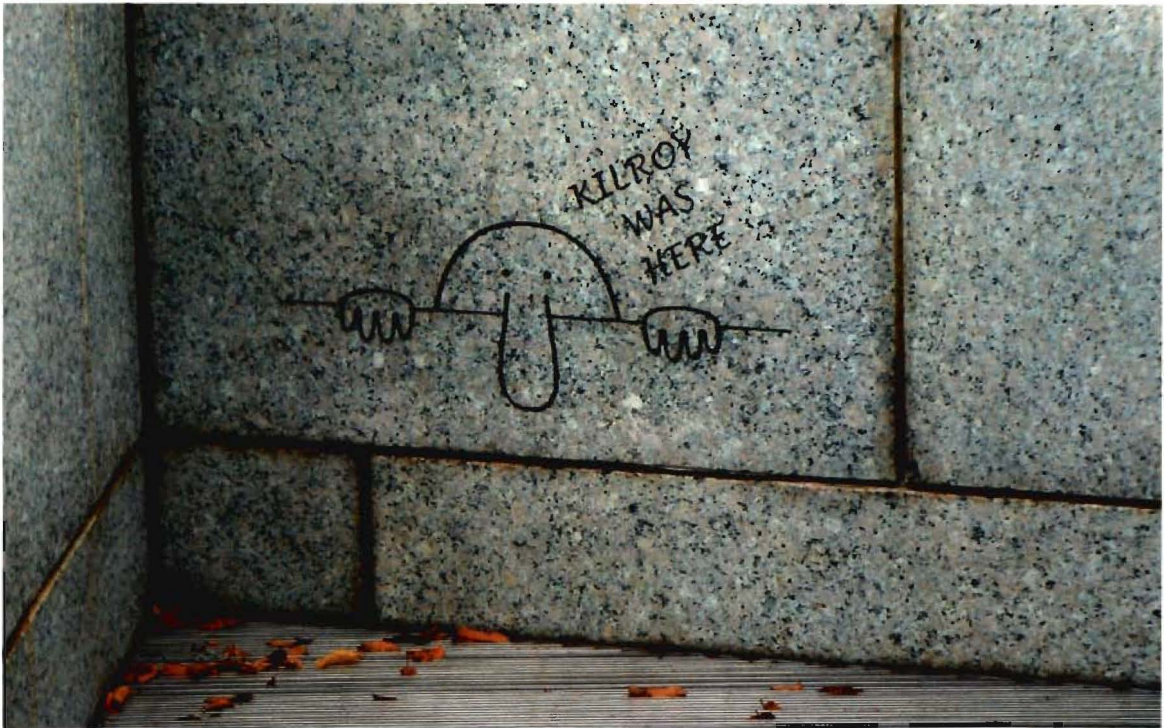


Figure 1. Faber, D. Kilroy Was Here.



Figure 2. Billings, B. Cornbread.





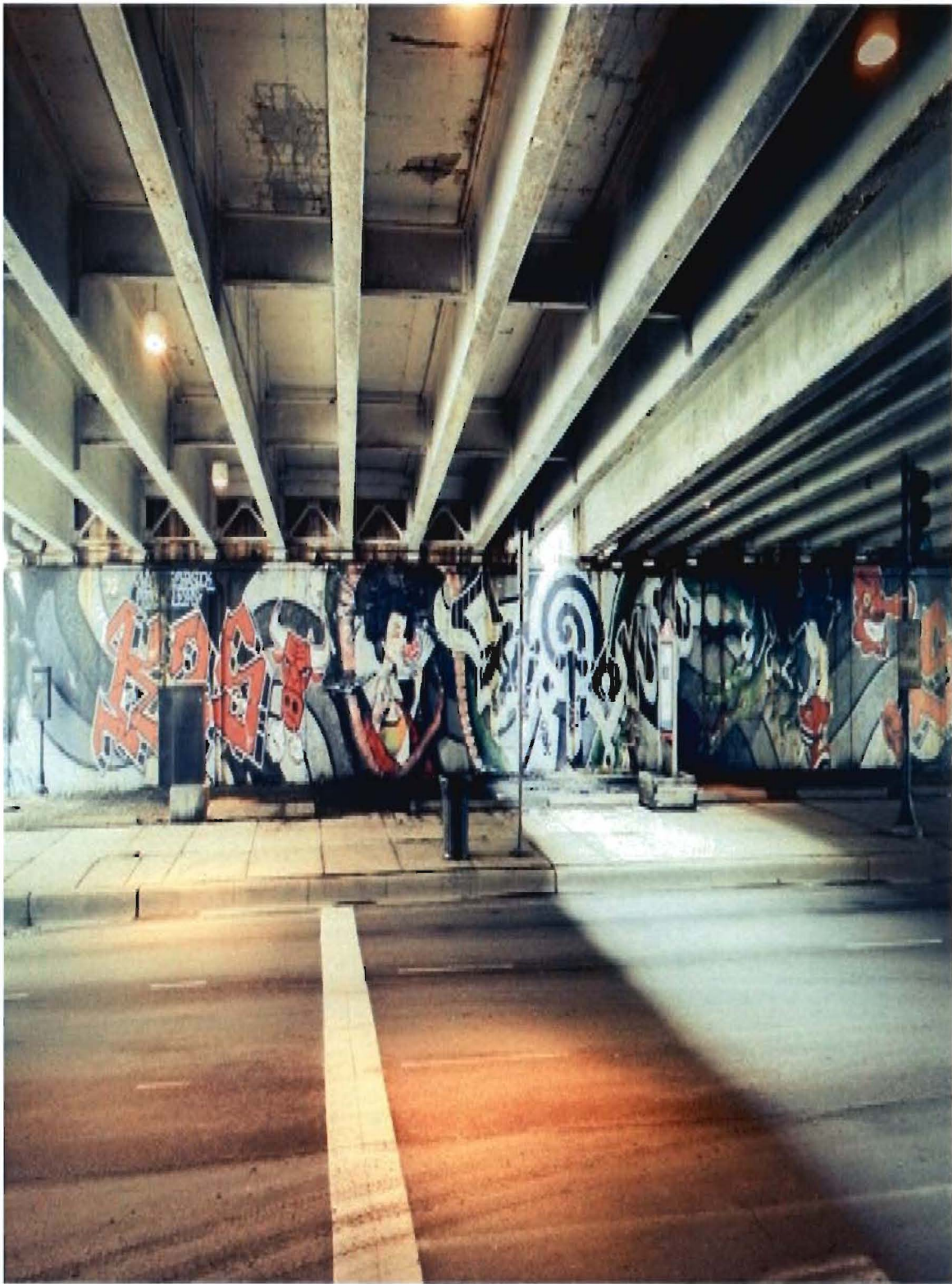
Figure 3. Markovich, K. Fuck Nato.



Figure 4. Markovich, K. Pity is Treason.



Figure 5. Markovich, K. Crazy Eyes.



*Figure 6.* Lareau, L. I am Thine.



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